

**OPENING REMARKS FOR CONGRESSMAN JIM TURNER
RANKING MEMBER, HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
DEMOCRATIC STRATEGY ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND THE PREPARE ACT
PRESS CONFERENCE, SEPTEMBER 24, 2003**

For Democrats, homeland security is a top priority. We believe that all necessary steps must be taken to make Americans as safe as we can be.

On September 5th, we announced a comprehensive strategy to strengthen the homeland security needs of this nation. It is a bold strategy to make America safer and more secure as quickly as possible. It is a plan that says “two years is too long to wait.” It is a plan that says the Administration must move faster and take stronger measures to close the security gaps that exist two years after the attacks of September 11th.

Our strategy identified critical, unmet needs in the Administration’s efforts to:

- (1) Prevent Terrorist Attacks;
- (2) Protect our borders on land, air and sea;
- (3) Provide enhanced security within the homeland; and
- (4) Prepare our Communities to respond to acts of terror.

Today, 116 members of Congress—all of the Democratic Leadership and over half of the Democratic Caucus—including all of the Democrats on the Select Committee on Homeland Security, introduce legislation to implement the first pillar of the Democratic Homeland Security Strategy with the *Preparing America to Respond Effectively*—or the “PREPARE Act.”

This legislation is a step forward in the debate over funding of our first responders. Non-partisan studies by the Council on Foreign Relations, Conference of Mayors and other respected organizations have all concluded that our first responders are underfunded and underprepared. Yet the Administration has maintained that their budget numbers are all that is needed.

No one knows the needs of first responders better than the first responders themselves. Under the PREPARE Act, experts and those in the field will determine what is needed to protect American families.

The PREPARE Act makes a historic commitment to determine what training and equipment first responders truly need to protect our communities and to get it to them within the next five years. Our first responders will be members of an Independent Task Force of experts to determine the level of essential capabilities and set needed standards. We then mandate that the Department of Homeland Security provide the necessary funding to arm our first responders with the training and equipment they need to protect our communities.

The PREPARE Act seeks to save the resources of cities and states by overhauling the current color coded warning system which, in its current form, costs cities too much and tells Americans too little about the threats we face.

The PREPARE Act also speeds up the deployment of technologies to ensure dependable communication among first responders at a disaster site.

The PREPARE Act is our way of saying that those who serve on the frontlines in the war on terror—who protect our communities every day—should get the equipment and training they need to do their mission.

Protecting America is a job for all Americans. I asked former Senator Warren Rudman to review this legislation and he said, “enactment of the PREPARE Act will serve to rectify many of the deficiencies identified in the Task Force report, and as a result, increase the security of our homeland.” I would like to take this opportunity to thank Senator Rudman for his endorsement of the PREPARE Act and the Task Force for their excellent work, as it has provided us with the foundation for our legislation.

The PREPARE Act is the first comprehensive approach to preparing the nation for acts of terrorism introduced in Congress since September 11. It is the right approach for our nation and is a critical step in our effort to secure the homeland.

I would now like to turn to Representative Bennie Thompson, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness and Response, who has been an important contributor to the development of this legislation.